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BIRDS OF LAKE CASSENCARRY

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Lake Cassencarry (33° 52' 10"S, 118° 29' 30"E) is situated in farmland 10km north of Ongerup. It is a flat-floored fossil lake covering about 230 ha that only fills about once every seven years following heavy falls of rain exceeding 100mm. When full, the water depth rarely exceeds 70cm. Other lakes in the general area are mainly much smaller than Lake Cassencarry, and also saline.

The lake was originally covered with *Eucalyptus occidentalis* 12-25m high over a second stratum of *Melaleuca cuticularis* 3-6m high and very dense in places. Half of the lake has been cleared for cropping and grazing, the remainder has been grazed by sheep (both for more than 50 years).

The lake last filled on 3 July 1978, after which the birds were censused. The lake's avifauna has not been previously documented.

A typical site (14 ha) of the cleared section at the lake's western end was selected for sampling as time was not generally available for sampling the whole lake. Recording, mainly by BJN, commenced on 7 July. From mid-August until the lake dried up the following January, an effort was made to record at fortnightly intervals. Recording began at 0700-0800 hours and lasted until all birds had been counted (20-60 minutes). When the population of a species exceeded 30, the number was usually estimated as the birds were frequently moving about while feeding. Maximum water depth in the study area was noted. The data are presented in Table 1 in columns a to m.

The typical site dried up between 6 and 25 December and the cleared area of the lake was censused twice (columns n and o). The whole lake was later censused twice (columns p and q).

Thirty species were recorded on the lake, and 25 of these within the typical site. Six species were breeding. Based on extensive bird recording in the Ongerup district by us since 1978, 20 of the species at Lake Cassencarry occur in local wetlands each year, but seven of these are infrequent. The remaining 10 species were only recorded following floods, and 6 of these only at Lake Cassencarry (Banded Stilt, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Long-toed Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Whiskered Tern). The Long-toed Stint had rarely been recorded in Western Australia prior to 1978 but it is now known to be a regular visitor (Blakers *et al.* 1984). Five of the species are trans-equatorial

TABLE 1
BIRDS RECORDED ON LAKE CASSENCARRY
(7 July 1978 to 16 February 1979)

RP	Species	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q
	Column	7	15	25	1	15	17	21	23	2	23	4	24	6	25	30	21	16
	Day	7	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	11	11	12	12	12	1	2
	Month																	
C	Hairy-headed Grebe																	
C	<i>Podiceps poliocephalus</i>	2															11*	3
D	Australasian Grebe																	
F	<i>Teuchaptis novaehollandiae</i>				2													
F	Australian Pelican																	
C	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>											5**						
C	Pacific Heron																	
C	<i>Ardea pacifica</i>	1					2			1		1			3	1	46	
C	White-faced Heron																	
F	<i>Ardea novaehollandiae</i>																	6
F	Sacred Ibis																	
D	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>														2		18	
D	Straw-necked Ibis																	
C	<i>Threskiornis spinicollis</i>										1							
C	Yellow-billed Spoonbill																	
C	<i>Platalea flavipes</i>																	
F	Black Swan																	
C	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	2	8	2														4*
C	Australian Shelduck																	
C	<i>Tadorna tadornoides</i>	2	2															
C	Pacific Black Duck																	
C	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	10				4			3									1 405
C	Grey Teal																	
D	<i>Anas gibberifrons</i>	35	23	35	2	60*	20	40*	60*	60*	85*	40	30	10	20	8	886	40
D	Chestnut Teal																	
D	<i>Anas castanea</i>	4			2	2	2		2									
D	Australian Shoveler																	
D	<i>Anas rhynchotis</i>								1	3								
C	Pink-eared Duck																	
	<i>Melanerhynchus melanerhynchus</i>																	

C	Marek Duck									2								30
D	Black-tailed Native-hen																	
	<i>Gallinula ventralis</i>												1					
D	Eurasian Coot																	
	<i>Fulica atra</i>				2	4	10*	8*		3			2					20
C	Red-capped Plover																	
	<i>Charadrius ruficapillus</i>																70	
C	Black-fronted Plover																	
	<i>Charadrius melanops</i>												5	2				9*
C	Black-winged Stilt																	
	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	10	2		30	40	60	70	60	240	130	130	100	1	2			130
N	Banded Stilt																	
	<i>Cladorhynchus leucocephalus</i>											20						
C	Red-necked Avocet																	
	<i>Recurvirostra novaehollandiae</i>	6	4		40	30	30	40	30	170	50							
F	Common Sandpiper																	
	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>																	2
N	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper																	
	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>																1	
N	Red-necked Stint																	
	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>												4				80	
N	Long-toed Stint																	
	<i>Calidris subminuta</i>												10					
N	Curlew Sandpiper																	
	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>																1	
D	Silver Gull																	
	<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>				5													
N	Whiskered Tern																	
	<i>Sterna hybrida</i>						20		20									

Total	56	69	43	6	143	98	160	184	181	500	248	166	138	35	164	1611	45
Number of species	7	6	4	3	7	6	5	7	7	6	7	3	8	7	8	14	4
Max. water depth (cm) in study area	37	37	36	35	34	34	33	32	30	26	20	11	6				

RP = Recording pattern in Ongerup district; C = Commonly recorded regardless of flooding; D = Infrequently recorded regardless of flooding; F = Only recorded following floods, but also in other locations; N = Only recorded following floods, but only at this location.

* = breeding record

** = flying over

migrants that usually arrive in southern Western Australia during spring (Common Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Long-toed Stint and Curlew Sandpiper).

The range of species utilizing Lake Cassencarry and the populations of most highlight the importance of this ephemeral wetland.

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THE DIBBLER (*PARANTECHINUS APICALIS* : DASYURIDAE) FOUND IN FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

In April 1984 a small, freshly dead marsupial was found on a track in the Fitzgerald River National Park, Western Australia, by the ranger in charge, George Duxbury. Not having seen an animal quite like it before, he froze it as quickly as possible and forwarded it to the Western Australian Museum for identification. The specimen was confirmed as a Dibbler, *Parantechinus apicalis* (Gray, 1842).

Sub-fossil remains of Dibbler in cave deposits indicate that when European man first colonised Australia the species probably ranged from the north-western end of the South-west Botanical Province at Shark Bay, to the eastern end of the Province at Israelite Bay on the Great Australian Bight in Western Australia; it also occurred on Eyre Peninsula, South Australia. Dibblers were not collected after 1884 (Ride 1970) and were presumed extinct when, in 1967, wildlife photographer Michael Morcombe captured two at Hassell Beach (then known as Cheyne Beach), 50 km east of Albany (Morcombe 1967). The same year another Dibbler was captured during a fauna survey of the same locality (Ride 1970).

Further searches for Dibblers were undertaken in the Hassell Beach area and later, following the killing of a Dibbler by a cat, near Jerdacuttup in 1976. Although another Dibbler was found on a different property near Jerdacuttup in late 1976 no more were recorded by surveys (Woolley 1977, 1980).

The finding of the latest specimen in Fitzgerald River National Park is important because it casts new light on the habitat requirements of the species and shows that the Dibbler is not yet extinct.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE 1984 FIND

The most recent Dibbler was found on autopsy to have been killed by a predator, probably a fox. Since it had been taken by a predator, the site of collection is not necessarily the place of capture. However, it is unlikely that a fox would transport prey more than two or three kilometres (D. King, pers. comm.) and it is considered that the point of capture occurred within that radius. Accordingly, vegetation types within that radius were examined, initially using Newbey's (1979) vegetation maps, then by field examination.

Most of the vegetation in the vicinity of the Dibbler site was sparse to dense mallee over heaths. This is unlike the habitat at Hassell Beach where Morcombe's Dibblers were collected (Woolley 1977). There were however, occasional dense thickets of proteaceous shrubs, mainly *Lambertia inermis*, which are not unlike the Hassell Beach habitat in physiognomy, if not in floristic composition.

One factor in common between the Hassell Beach habitat and the site in the Fitzgerald River National Park is the absence of fire for a long period. The Hassell Beach habitat had "not been burnt for many years" when Morcombe collected the two Dibblers in 1967 (Woolley 1977.) The map of the Fitzgerald River National Park and vacant crown land north of the Park showing vegetation age since last fire (Map 1) illustrates that much of the vegetation is also old. The hypothesis that age of the vegetation since fire is important has been proposed previously (Woolley 1980).